

# Ego to Eco

## A joyous and enriching journey

Nick Heap



### Introduction

Every day we hear more about the dire situation our unthinking treatment of our planetary home is causing. It is profoundly depressing. Then we hear that we will have to give up so much of what we take for granted and think we need and deserve to fix it. This message adds another layer of anger, despair, and hopelessness. The only way out of it is a painful struggle which is an unattractive prospect.

I want to challenge this narrative. Perhaps the way to a sustainable future where we live in harmony with nature and each other could be joyous and fun. Learning to live together on a small planet will enrich us all. Let's choose to find a way that uses and brings out the best in ourselves and each other. We can do it. We know how to do this on a small scale. Let's find out what is working and see how to do more of it joyfully.

My thoughts on some simple, scalable, practical actions follow.

### Listening

If you talk to someone who listens and is present, you think and feel better. Listening is the basis of all coaching, counselling, mentoring, and therapy. It works very well when two people *take turns*. As we do more of this, we solve our immediate worries and think about the bigger picture. We also act to make our world a better place.

This simple process is infinitely scalable. Anyone who can listen can do it. When people feel heard, they want to listen to others. Listening is a good virus. It deserves spreading.

It's easy to test. Just ask a friend or colleague if they would like a good listening to and listen as though there is nothing you would rather do instead. Then say you would like a turn. Great things will happen.

Mutual listening is enjoyable and rewarding. You will get closer to each other and understand each other's worlds. You will both become inspired to act and learn.

Listening is even more enlightening and consequential when the person you listen to is different from you. Once you know one person from another group, you can never again stereotype that group.

I have the privilege of listening to people in five African countries. Their kindness and wisdom are an utter revelation.

[A short video about listening \(http://bit.ly/ameduj1\)](http://bit.ly/ameduj1)

[Listening to a Kenyan farmer talking about climate change \(http://bit.ly/ameduj2\)](http://bit.ly/ameduj2)



## Imagining

One of our core qualities as humans is boundless imagination. We want to build the positive images we create. There is an “Imagine” movement, starting with “Imagine Chicago”, where people across a community have conversations about what is good and great about their community and how it can be better. Because the exchanges make people feel good, they have the confidence to make things better. The “Imagine Chicago” movement is generating positive and transformative initiatives across the city.

This idea is also infinitely scalable. It's easy to “Imagine” a village, a town, a region, a country or even “Imagine Earth”.

How about contacting someone in your network who is different from you? They might do different work, have a different world view or politics, or live in another country or all of these. Just ask these questions and listen. “What do you love about planet Earth?”, “If you were revisiting planet Earth in 100 years-time and thought, this is amazing, it's what I had always dreamed the world would be like, what would be happening?” “What sort of world do you want to leave to our great-great-grand-children?” “How would you feel?” “What is one thing, however small, that you will do this week to move it in the direction you want?” “How would you feel if you knew you had made a positive difference?”

These conversations work even better if you share the results in a small group. Then people support and encourage each other. It is counter-cultural and feels scary to take power and responsibility. It can also be enormous fun if we do things together and don't take ourselves too seriously. Many small actions can and will make a positive difference. The present state of things is also the result of billions of small steps.

[Video of three of us "Imagining Earth". \(http://bit.ly/amedjuj3\)](http://bit.ly/amedjuj3)

## Connecting

One thing is clear. We are not alone in seeing that we need to work together for the good of ourselves and the fellow inhabitants of our home. In "Blessed Unrest," Paul Hawken talks of at least *two million organisations* (Note organisations, not individuals) worldwide with similar or compatible aims. Although collectively this is "The biggest movement the world is unaware of", it is not yet joined up.

Many years ago, I ran a Networking the Networks event in London. People from thirty developmental networks met to connect, listen to each other, cooperate, and learn. We discovered our common purpose was "Creating Transformation".

We could replicate this online or face to face in communities. It could lead to joint projects and effective action.

As well as networking organisations, networking individuals with common interests in positive change is possible. How about building or joining a networking organisation that is searchable by skills or interests? Then it would be easy to find people to work with creatively. We could do this online and worldwide, and local networks in a community would help a lot. When the people in a community, even a small one, work together, their joint abilities, contacts and skills can create significant change and have done so.

We can do much more connecting informally. It's fun doing random acts of listening where you connect with strangers to understand their worlds from their point of view. It helps you appreciate the richness of the people around you (and your prejudices). Let's also have more conversations about what sort of world people want. What do we want our great-great-grandchildren to inherit? I have done this, and I sense there is agreement on a just, sustainable, and peaceful world. If this is so, let's think together about what we need to do to get there and challenge each other to do it.

Connecting is also infinitely scalable.

## Organising

Any formal structure for organising a worldwide change effort risks wasting energy by political infighting or protecting itself from attacks. Managing it will consume more effort than delivering the outcomes. So what is the absolute minimum necessary?

I don't think we need a structure. What we can do is to bring people together. Let's get together people of goodwill who make good things happen, whether organised or not. We can create a space (virtual or physical) where those people can talk to each other, support each other and work out what to do to make our world a better place.

Let's have lots of these groups. Let's light many fires. Some people think they have a vested interest in keeping our failing system. They won't be able to keep out the light.

This idea is also infinitely scalable and easy to test. All we need is two or three positive people who we would love to spend time with, create a space, light the blue touch paper, and stand well back. It could be FUN (which is where we came in)

## Fulfilling

To "fulfil" means "to bring into effect". It's lovely to do this when the whole experience is enjoyable. There is almost nothing better than doing great work together.

Bill, a colleague in the lab where we were graduate students, had just moved into a brand-new house. The garden was a complete mess, full of debris and half-bricks. He invited eighteen friends to a garden(ing) party. They brought their spades and forks, and on a hard-working and sweaty day, they landscaped the garden. They then had a bit of a celebration.

Bill glowed as he told me about how much fun and satisfaction everyone had had. It seems perfectly possible and reasonable that we would have just as much fulfilment and happiness working together to restore our world.

We can start this locally. We only have to decide to do it.

[A short video on deciding \(http://bit.ly/amedjuj4\)](http://bit.ly/amedjuj4)

[Helping a Kenyan farmer decide what to do \(http://bit.ly/amedjuj5\)](http://bit.ly/amedjuj5)

## Happiness

Change can be joyful. It does not have to be a struggle. If you ask people to tell stories about when they have been happy, they almost always are about experiences that cost little. Sharing happy stories also makes you happy. Even more remarkably, when people tell stories about when they have made someone else happy, their energy and enthusiasm rocket. It looks like the simplest way to be happy is to make someone else happy. You can do this with a smile or being appreciative, or just listening.

We can spread this practice of sharing happy stories without limit. When people know they can be happy without needing even more stuff, the excessive demand that drives climate change will fall.

Less demand will reduce the need for “work”, which will, at last, increase the amount of discretionary time to look after each other and the planet and live and learn.

[Video of people sharing happy stories \(http://bit.ly/amedjuj6\)](http://bit.ly/amedjuj6)

## Hope and Appreciation

The potential and actual environmental problems we face are real and daunting. It would be easy to despair and give up. “Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.” Despair is a choice anyone can make. I prefer the opposite hopeful option.

We can all do something. One of the simplest things is to catch people doing things *right*. Simple appreciation is powerful and costs nothing. Suppose we see someone picking up litter in our street. Saying, “Thanks for looking after our street and the planet we all live on”, will encourage that person to do more. Appreciation of good things grows good things and spreads.

We have a choice. Let’s choose hope. Let’s decide to make a difference. If not us, who?

## Finally

If enough of us can do these simple things, we will stop thinking that moving from ego to eco and solving the climate crisis is something we “ought” do. Instead, it will be rewarding and joyous doing these both individually and together.

The “hard” things like conscious consumption and effective campaigning will turn out to be not so difficult after all.

## Acknowledgements

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## Resources

### Listening

[Listening \(http://bit.ly/amedjuj7\)](http://bit.ly/amedjuj7) and [Re-evaluation Counselling \(http://bit.ly/amedjuj8\)](http://bit.ly/amedjuj8)

### Imagining

[Imagine Chicago \(http://bit.ly/amedjuj9\)](http://bit.ly/amedjuj9)

## Connecting

[Blessed Unrest](http://bit.ly/amedjuj10) (<http://bit.ly/amedjuj10>) and [Random Acts of Listening](http://bit.ly/amedjuj11) (<http://bit.ly/amedjuj11>)

## Organising

[Open Spaces](http://bit.ly/amedjuj12) (<http://bit.ly/amedjuj12>) and [Idea Ping Pong](http://bit.ly/amedjuj13) (<http://bit.ly/amedjuj13>)

## Happiness

[Happiness Exercise](http://bit.ly/amedjuj14) (<http://bit.ly/amedjuj14>)

## Hope and Appreciation

[Appreciation](http://bit.ly/amedjuj15) (<http://bit.ly/amedjuj15>) and [The New One Minute Manager](http://bit.ly/amedjuj16) (<http://bit.ly/amedjuj16>)

### Note for readers of the print edition

Please type the bit.ly links in the text or the resources section into any browser to access the materials.

## About Nick

I am a facilitator of change, development and learning. I help people think about and work on issues that don't have one right answer.

I have worked with people from large and small organisations and in the private and public sector, sole traders and private individuals on many issues including motivating teams, improving working relationships, influencing upwards, developing soft skills, career and crisis counselling, managing time, profiling excellent performers and conflict resolution.

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## A note about AMED

*Sadly, so far, nobody has expressed a willingness to take over from the outgoing AMED Council. So in the circumstances, the EGM on 26 May is likely to confirm that AMED will finally cease to operate as an educational charity by the end of 2022 at the latest.*



AMED stands for the Association for Management Education and Development, [www.amed.org.uk](http://www.amed.org.uk). We are a long-established membership organisation and educational charity devoted to developing people and organisations.

Our purpose is to serve as a forum for people who want to share, learn and experiment, and find support, encouragement, and innovative ways of communicating. Our conversations are open, constructive, and facilitated.

Through AMED, we strive to benefit our members and the wider society. Exclusive Member benefits include excellent professional indemnity cover at a significant discount, free copies of the quarterly journal *e-O&P*, and discounted fees for participation in a range of face-to-face events, special interest groups, and our interactive website. We aim to build on our three cornerstones of **knowledge**, **innovation** and **networking** in the digital age. Wherever we can, AMED Members, Networkers and Guests seek to work with likeminded individuals and organisations to generate synergy and critical mass for change. [www.amed.org.uk](http://www.amed.org.uk), or contact **Linda Williams**, our Membership Administrator, E: [amedoffice@amed.org.uk](mailto:amedoffice@amed.org.uk), T: 0300 365 1247